



Newcomer Employment Study, 2023

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Introduction

Dauphin & Area Welcoming Communities Coalition (DAWCC) is one of about 80 Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) working in communities and regions across Canada. The purpose of LIPs is to support the two-way street of settlement and integration where immigrants and host communities both experience change and varying levels of adaptation.

Formed in late 2020, DAWCC was created as a regional partnership serving the area including the City of Dauphin, Rural Municipality of Dauphin, Municipality of Ethelbert, Municipality of Gilbert Plains, Grandview Municipality, Rural Municipality of Lakeshore, Mossey River Municipality and Municipality of Ste. Rose. DAWCC is governed by a partnership council under the leadership of the DAWCC Coordinator.

DAWCC's mission is to help build welcoming and inclusive communities within the service region by reducing barriers to newcomer integration. In early 2022, DAWCC created its initial strategic plan and identified three priority areas:

- social inclusion
- access to services
- improved labour market outcomes

This study was initiated under DAWCC's labour market priority with the purpose of gathering information to better understand regional labour market needs and the needs and experiences of newcomer employees. Like many communities and areas across Canada, Dauphin and the surrounding region are looking to immigration as a strategy to help fill current and future workforce vacancies. The information collected by this project will feed into the development of the region's strategic recruitment initiative and will help maximize available resources and inform future needs as more newcomers arrive in the region.

Methodology

The study was designed and facilitated by LJS Consulting. Information was collected through two online surveys followed by two focus groups.

Survey 1 was distributed to regional employers and collected information about labour market needs and successes and challenges related to hiring immigrant employees. The survey was distributed by Survey Monkey in January 2023 and was followed by an online employer focus group on February 2, 2023.

Survey 2 was distributed to newcomers residing in Dauphin and the areas in and around Ethelbert, Gilbert Plains, Grandview, Ste. Rose, Rorketon and Winnipegosis, DAWCC's service area. The survey was distributed by Survey Monkey in January 2023 and collected information about newcomer employment experiences. The survey was followed by an in-person newcomer focus group on February 8, 2023.

While the results of this study represent the perspectives of a small group and should not be interpreted as the views of all newcomers or regional employers, they provide a snapshot of the current labour market situation as well as successes and challenges related to newcomer employment in the region.

Executive Summary

Employers of all sizes in Dauphin and across the surrounding region report difficulties filling workplace vacancies. The problem may be poised to worsen as over 90% of employer respondents projected their workforce requirements will increase in the next 3-5 years.

Employers are keenly interested in attracting newcomer talent to meet labour market needs. Some employers are trying to recruit newcomers directly while, on a regional level, a partnership of rural municipalities and the City of Dauphin is developing a strategic recruitment initiative to bring skilled newcomers to the area.

The employers who participated in this study were overwhelmingly positive about newcomer employees. Survey results reveal employers are eager to hire newcomers and believe newcomers are important for regional economic growth and community development. Many employers already have newcomer employees on staff and almost all employer respondents indicated they have at least thought about hiring a newcomer.

Employee responses corroborate the idea that regional employers are receptive to hiring newcomers. The vast majority of newcomer respondents indicated their employers made it easy for them to understand their jobs and they reported feeling welcomed at their workplaces.

However, while employers are interested in hiring newcomers, the study revealed many employers lack the knowledge or resources to assess how prior skills and experience can transfer into the Canadian workplace and many do not know where to find supports to assist with the onboarding of newcomer employees. Outside of the workplace, limited housing options, lack of transportation and a shortage of childcare spaces were also identified as barriers to newcomer hiring.

On the other side, although most newcomer employees indicated it was easy to find a job in the region, most respondents were highly skilled and highly educated and the majority reported being underemployed and unable to use prior education and skills in their current job. Some of these employee respondents pointed to their limited English skills as a barrier.

Newcomers have an increasingly important role in filling regional labour market shortage. As the success of recruitment initiatives depends on the integration and retention of the newcomers who arrive in the region, it is important that receiving communities, regional service providers and stakeholders make efforts to understand the needs of newcomer employees and the employers who hire them.

Survey and Focus Group Results

Employer Survey

Respondents

Between January 9 to 29, 2023, an employer survey, circulated by Survey Monkey, collected 23 responses from a diverse group of regional employers. The majority of respondents were from the City of Dauphin but several employers had multiple service sites within the region and several were solely based in the municipalities of Ethelbert, Gilbert Plains, Grandview, Mossey River, Ste. Rose and Dauphin.

Employers were almost evenly distributed between small, medium and large businesses with two of the largest respondents having 100 or more employees.

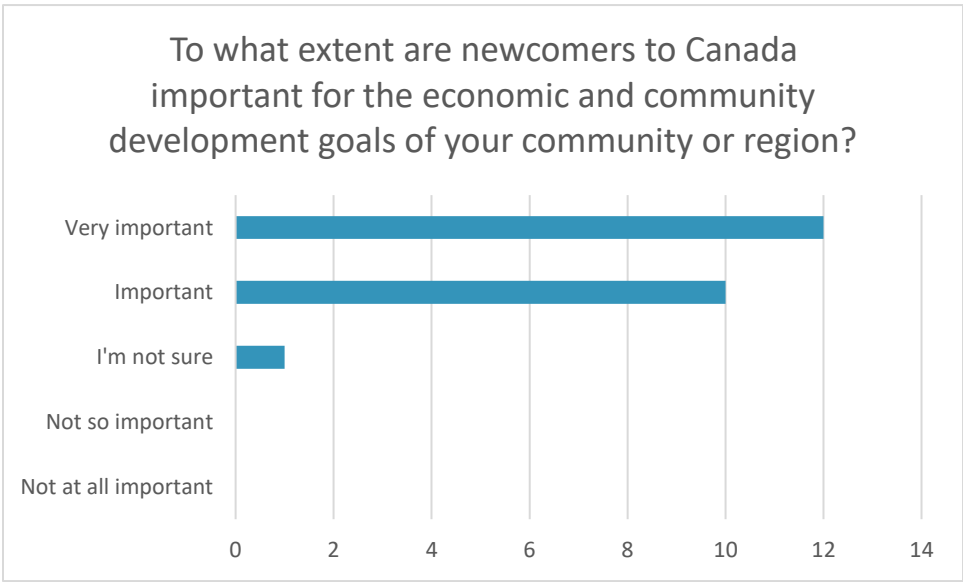
Fifteen sectors were represented including: agriculture, manufacturing/production, skilled trades, restaurant, hospitality/customer service, retail/sales, education, health care, social services, financial institutions, recreation services, government and public services, direct sales/distribution centre and veterinary care.

Labour Market Needs

The majority of employers (95%) projected an increase in labour market need over the next three to five years. 74% projected a slight increase and 17% foresee a significant increase. 91% of employers reported they have trouble finding employees and 52% have challenges retaining employees.

Interest in Hiring Newcomers

The survey results point to strong regional interest in hiring newcomers. An overwhelming 95% of employers indicated they believe newcomers are important to the economic and community development goals of the region. One employer was unsure and no employers indicated newcomers were unimportant.



Over 60% of surveyed employers already have newcomer employees on staff and 95% indicated they have considered hiring a newcomer (defined as an immigrant who has lived in Canada 5 years or less.) The majority of employers (91%) believe their workplaces have a positive attitude towards newcomers to Canada, cultural diversity and the presence of newcomers.

Supports and Resources Needed

Employers were asked what assistance they might need when hiring a newcomer. Respondents could pick from a list of choices or provide a customized answer. From the list of five provided options, in descending order, employers chose:

- Assistance with communication (57%)
- Assistance with ongoing education/training (43%)
- Assistance with the hiring process (39%)
- Assistance with orientation (35%)

In the optional open-ended portion of this question, employers identified they may also need help with:

- Comparing skills, education, trades and other qualifications between home countries and Canada
- Language barriers
- Cultural understanding
- Assessing current skills and areas for improvement

Barriers to Bringing Newcomers on Staff

Employers were provided with a list of 10 options and asked what they considered to be the top 5 barriers to bringing newcomers on staff. They could also provide a customized answer. From list of provided options, employers chose:

- Language skills and abilities (70%)
- Assessing skills and competencies acquired abroad (48%)
- Complexity of the immigration process (48%)
- Communication (35%)
- Orientation and training (26%)

Additional concerns identified in the open-ended portion of this question were: housing, transportation, processing time of applications and the need for a specific program to bring newcomers to rural and smaller communities.

Workplace Training and Resources for Newcomer Employees

Employers were asked what resources and training supports they would be interested in providing for newcomer employees. A list of 5 options were provided as well as the option to provide a customized answer. From the list of provided options, employers chose:

- Mentorship or job-shadowing (55%)
- Referrals to free English language training for newcomers (45%)
- Orientation/training in first language of newcomer employees (35%)

- Onsite workplace-specific language training (20%)
- Assistance with translation or interpretation (15%)

In the open-ended section, one respondent indicated it would be difficult to provide newcomer specific supports as it would take another employee away the job and there were no current programs to support new hires. The comment highlights how internal capacities may limit the extent employers can support their newcomer employees.

Language Skills & Abilities

50% of employers had never hired newcomers with low English. The respondents who had experience with low English employees reported job performance was affected by:

- difficulty communicating with supervisors and co-workers (30%)
- difficulty learning and understanding the job (20%)
- difficulty understanding safe work practices (20%)
- difficulty understanding workplace culture (10%)

In the open-ended portion of this question, two employers indicated they were able manage low English skills by placing employees with limited English in task-focused positions requiring little verbal interaction.

Regional Resources Available for Employers of Newcomers

When asked about supports and resources available for employers of newcomers, only 7 of the 23 respondents (30%) were aware of resources, identifying Regional Connections English classes and other settlement supports. Nearly 70% of respondents indicated they would like more information about available supports and resources.

Employer Focus Group

Following the survey, an employer focus group was held by Zoom on February 2, 2023. The focus group was led by a facilitator with 7 employer participants, representatives from Rural Manitoba Economic Development (RMED), the Executive Director of Parkland Chamber of Commerce and the DAWCC Coordinator. Employer representation was regional and multi-sectoral.

After the facilitator reviewed the survey highlights, focus group participants worked on three discussion topics in breakout rooms, reporting back to the group after each breakout session.

Breakout Room 1 – Labour Market Needs

In breakout room 1, participants were asked to discuss current and future labour market needs and identify challenges to attracting and retaining employees.

Participants were not surprised by the survey results which indicated employers were experiencing difficulties recruiting and retaining employees. One larger employer spoke of unprecedented vacancies in all job categories, low and high skilled. Several employers indicated they had vacant positions which had been advertised and remained open for more than a year.

Employers spoke of a large number of retirees, many of whom were retiring earlier than expected, as well as increasing numbers of employees taking time away from work because of physical and mental health issues.

Employers noted the rising cost of living and inflation rate were affecting employee expectations of wages and were also factors leading to vacancies, especially for smaller and nonunionized employers who were unable to offer starting wages in line with unionized sites.

Numerous employers commented on the problems created when employees in entry level positions leave for higher paying jobs after being trained. Some employers have to continually backfill entry level positions as employees make internal moves into higher-skilled roles while employers with mainly entry-level positions are managing high staff turnover when employees leave for outside opportunities.

All employers in the focus group described employee recruitment as difficult. One participant observed that out-of-region candidates are often hesitant to move to rural areas. An example was provided from a recent Brandon career fair in which student job seekers were reluctant to move out of the Brandon area even though permanent jobs were offered elsewhere. Instead, the job seekers opted to take temporary or term positions to be nearer to home. Another employer noted that despite the company offering a range of job opportunities and shifts along with a competitive wage, employee recruitment was still a challenge.

Numerous participants indicated recruitment of summer students was increasingly difficult. One organization had not received applications from summer student for the past three years while another had received only one. Employers also noted youth often expect a higher starting wage than offered.

When discussing reasons for recruitment challenges, some employers pointed to the lack of childcare spaces and the expense of childcare, both of which impact the ability of many employees to attend work. Employers noted some female employees do not return to work after a maternity leave.

Employers spoke of using multiple advertising and promotion methods to try and recruit employees including local papers, online sites, job fairs, social media and radio. Despite these efforts, sometimes no applications are received.

Breakout Room 2 – Hiring Newcomers: Strengths and Opportunities, Needs and Challenges

In breakout room 2, participants were asked to discuss the strengths, opportunities, needs and challenges of hiring newcomers.

Focus group employers were overwhelmingly positive about hiring newcomers and identified many strengths and opportunities when bringing newcomers on staff, including:

- enhanced workplaces due to different points of view and ways of problem solving
- newcomer employees were described as a “breath of fresh air” (new perspectives and positivity brought to the workplace)
- great work ethic; motivated; willingness to work
- lots of knowledge and skills
- increased diversity can create more interest from job-seekers and can increase customer base
- newcomer employees are generally respectful and appreciative of the opportunity

The group identified the following needs and challenges associated with hiring newcomer employees:

- low language skills can create workplace safety concerns e.g. driving, reading instructions or providing medications, etc.
- language skills training is needed, perhaps at worksite
- job-shadowing and mentoring are valuable, but can be difficult to provide because of staffing limitations
- communication skills can be a challenge and sometimes the challenge comes from a strong accent or from the tone of speaking (cultural norms,) not always because of English skills
- entry level jobs are often used as a stepping stone for roles that align with previous skills and education; many newcomers are highly-skilled and want better jobs
- manager education is needed to build workplace understanding of cultural differences
- transportation and housing for newcomers is a challenge in the region
- efforts are needed to highlight the benefits immigrants bring to the workplace

Breakout Room 3 – Would the Regional Employers Benefit from an Immigration Strategy?

Breakout room 3 introduced the possibility of an intentional immigration strategy for Dauphin and area. Participants were asked: (a) if their workplaces would benefit from a recruitment initiative; (b) who should participate in the development of the initiative; and (c) what considerations would be important for a successful strategy.

(a) Would workplaces benefit?

Focus group participants agreed the region and regional employees would benefit from a recruitment strategy. Some employers with experience recruiting newcomer employees directly through LMIAs (labour market impact assessments) spoke of the time-consuming, costly and resource-intensive process employers could avoid if a regional program was established.

(b) Who should participate?

There was consensus among participants that a strategic initiative would benefit from employer input and participation. The group also felt HR professionals would be helpful to the process as they have knowledge of licencing regulations, required job skills and workplace procedures and policies.

(c) What considerations are important for a successful strategy?

Participants identified numerous items that would support a successful recruitment initiative, including:

- Newcomer applicants should have clear and ample information about regional job availabilities and local context (weather, limited transportation, remoteness and distance to cities, etc.)
- Applicants would benefit from pre-arrival information as well as in-house welcoming committees at the workplace.
- Receiving communities have a responsibility to create situations and events where community members can learn about one another and other cultures.

- Housing is needed. Available housing stock is often expensive, especially for minimum wage earners.
- The initiative should have a built-in “community connections” component to help new arrivals connect to the area and feel welcomed.
- Childcare access is a challenge in terms of immigrants finding sustainable employment. Language barriers within the childcare setting can also be a barrier to newcomer access.
- Lack of transportation is an issue within rural communities and *between* rural communities and larger centers. Obtaining a driver’s licence and purchasing a vehicle can be difficult for newcomers. A creative transportation solution (e.g. a rural “Uber”) would help support immigrant settlement and newcomer access to employment.

Employer focus group participants were well-informed about regional labour market needs and were enthusiastic about the prospect of an immigration initiative to help meet current and future labour market needs.

Newcomer Survey

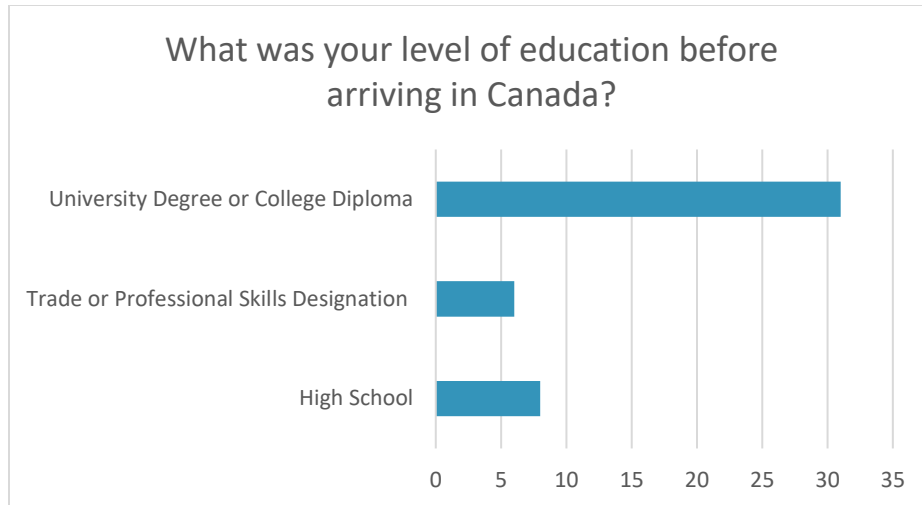
Respondents

Between January 8 and 22, 2023, a newcomer employment survey, circulated by Survey Monkey, gathered 45 responses from newcomers to Canada (5 years or less) and longer term immigrants. 75% of respondents were from the City of Dauphin, 21% were from municipalities of Ethelbert, Dauphin and Gilbert Plains and 4% (2 respondents) resided outside of the target area in the municipalities of Roblin and Erickson.

Most of the respondents were fairly new to Canada. Almost half (49%) had lived in the area for less than 1 year and 27% reported living in the area between 1 and 5 years. The remaining 24% had lived in the area for 5 years or more.

42% of respondents indicated they arrived in Canada as temporary workers, 40% arrived through the recent CUAET (Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel) pathway launched on March 17, 2022 and 20% arrived as permanent residents. Although CUAET respondents were not asked, it is a fair assumption that most (if not all) CUAET-pathway respondents are work permit holders, which also places them in the category of temporary worker. The remaining respondents reported arriving in Canada as international students or visitors.

Most respondents reported having high education levels when arriving in Canada: 69% arrived with a university degree or college diploma and 13% held professional or skills training designations. 61% of respondents reported they were unable to find employment in their profession or matching their skills training.



Employment

At the time of the survey, 86% of respondents were employed, 77% of whom had full time jobs. 63% of respondents indicated it was easy or somewhat easy to find employment. Most of the employed respondents reported they had a job waiting for them when they arrived or they were able to secure employment within a short period of time, usually within a few weeks or months.

The majority of employed respondents (69%) indicated they were satisfied with their jobs. Of those who were dissatisfied, the reasons provided include:

- not enough English to work in field of specialty;
- not enough hours;
- work is too hard for the pay;
- work is not permanent;
- too educated for the job.

The majority of employed respondents (87.5%) said their employer makes it easy to understand the job. A similar 87.5% of employed respondents indicated they feel welcomed and included at their workplace.

Resources and Supports

When respondents were asked to list services or organizations that had helped them in their current community, they acknowledged Regional Connections, Parkland Job Opportunity Centre, Parkland Ukrainian Family Fund, Dauphin Friendship Centre and volunteers, illustrating good connections with regional service providers and volunteers.

Nearly 80% of respondents agreed with the statement: My community provides educational opportunities for newcomers. In the open-ended responses to this question there were positive comments about English classes and a suggestion to add more. One respondent pointed to the need for credential recognition so they could work in their profession of training and another indicated they would like to study nursing or work as an optician.

Survey respondents were asked to list the most important thing newcomers should know to be successful in a new community. Several themes emerged from the answer including the importance of networking and making connections and the importance of improving English skills. Answers included:

- “... try to connect to reputable organizations and places; some individuals, although well-meaning, may give wrong or bad information.”
- “Volunteer... No one knows me. I don’t know anybody [or] anything about a community, then you have to try to do something. That is a “Volunteer”. You can meet a lot of people and personal connections are wealth.”
- “Make sure that you are working on your networking – more people you know – more opportunities are available to you.”
- “Take English classes, it will help you to understand and communicate in the community.”

In a separate question, just under half of respondents (47%) indicated they are volunteering in their community.

Newcomer Focus Group

On February 9, 2023, as another option for newcomers to share perspectives on employment, the DAWCC coordinator facilitated a newcomer focus group during a Regional Connections language class (Canadian Language Benchmarks 3 and 4.) 10 participants representing 3 countries of origin were in the group. All but one participant were new to Canada within the past year and 80% (8 of the 10 participants) had arrived from Ukraine via CUAET. The group was limited in diversity and information was influenced by shared experiences.

Employment

9 of the 10 focus group participants were employed. The lone unemployed participant was caring for an infant and waiting for childcare before being able to embark on a job search.

Similar to findings from the newcomer survey, focus group participants indicated it was easy to find a job. Participants used a variety of strategies and resources for their job search including engaging the services of the local employment agency, Parkland Job Opportunity, obtaining help from volunteers and looking for jobs on their own by taking resumes directly to employers. Many participants used a mix of strategies when looking for employment.

Overall, participants were happy with their jobs although they spoke of limitations due to lower English skills. Several participants revealed employers had been flexible and offered alternative employment options more suited to lower language levels when the applicant had applied for a job requiring stronger English. Several respondents expressed disappointment over the barriers they faced because of low English skills. One participant had applied for and was offered a job online before arriving in Canada but the offer was later terminated when he reported for work and his English was determined to be too low for the position.

Resources and Supports

Focus group participants were asked to share their perspective on what employers can do to make it easier for newcomer to understand a job and be successful in the Canadian workplace. Many participants indicated the onboarding process was confusing and moved too quickly. Several participants revealed they did not know what they were signing during onboarding and often felt compelled to sign documents regardless of whether or not they understood because they did not want to negatively affect the offer of employment.

Many focus group participants indicated they did not understand group benefit plans, payroll deductions and TD1s. Many reported being surprised that take-home pay differed from the hourly rate offered as, in their home countries, the hourly rate offered is based on a post-deduction calculation. Participants suggested a slower onboarding and orientation would be helpful to understanding the workplace and workplace processes and they also pointed to the benefits of having translated documents when possible.

Not surprisingly, as the focus group took place in an English class, participants spoke about their desire to improve English so they could better their job prospects. Many participants indicated they would welcome the opportunity to participate in language learning on the job as it would reduce the need to attend classes after work. One participant indicated newcomers should know it may be a “long trip” to reach employment goals.

When participants were asked what employers could do to make newcomer feel welcomed in the workplace, some participants reported benefitting from being paired with an experienced worker during the first weeks or months of employment. This situation helped immensely towards understanding the workplace and the job duties.

Focus group participants also spoke about community-based items. Some participants suggested there should be more free activities for children, pointing out the only indoor playground had limited hours. Other participants spoke about the limited education options available at the local community college.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The survey and focus group results reveal employers are extremely eager to recruit and hire newcomer talent. As the region is experiencing a significant labour shortage and labour needs are projected to rise, it is unsurprising there is high employer interest in a regional strategy to recruit newcomer employees. Employers feel there is a role for them in the development and functioning of such a strategy as they are well-informed about the qualifications and skills required to fill labour market vacancies.

On the employee side, newcomers are able to find jobs quickly and most feel supported and welcomed at their workplaces, indicating positive workplace opinions of newcomer employees. However, newcomer participants also reported job limitations due to lower language skills as well as frustration when prior education and work experience is unrecognized in the Canadian workplace. These findings illustrate the importance of recruiting newcomer talent that corresponds with regional labour needs and supporting employers to understand how newcomer skills and experience can be used in their worksites.

Employers and newcomer employees will benefit from knowing about **free language classes**, such as those delivered by the regional settlement office, Regional Connections, and the option to partner with Regional Connections to deliver **English at Work** programming on the jobsite.

Employers revealed they need assistance assessing newcomer skills, hiring and orienting newcomers and implementing workplace supports to ensure successful workplace integration. To develop in these areas, employers can connect with the new IRCC-funded **Manitoba Immigrant Employment Council (MBIEC)**, a collaboration of Manitoba employers who share and develop employer-oriented solutions for effective newcomer hiring and retention.

Outside of the workplace, employers and newcomers identified several external barriers to successful newcomer employment including limited housing, lack of transportation, shortage of childcare, limited post-secondary options and the need for a regional recruitment strategy. Ultimately, the success of newcomer integration and retention can be greatly enhanced by the collaborative efforts of employers, stakeholders and receiving communities, a process which the region's immigration partnership, DAWCC, can play a supporting role.

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

CUAET	Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel
DAWCC	Dauphin & Area Welcoming Communities Coalition
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
LIP	Local Immigration Partnership
LMIA	Labour Market Impact Assessment
MBIEC	Manitoba Immigrant Employment Council
MPNP	Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program
PR	Permanent Resident
TFW	Temporary Foreign Worker
WP	Work Permit

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